

4 Wikis: Easy Collaboration for All

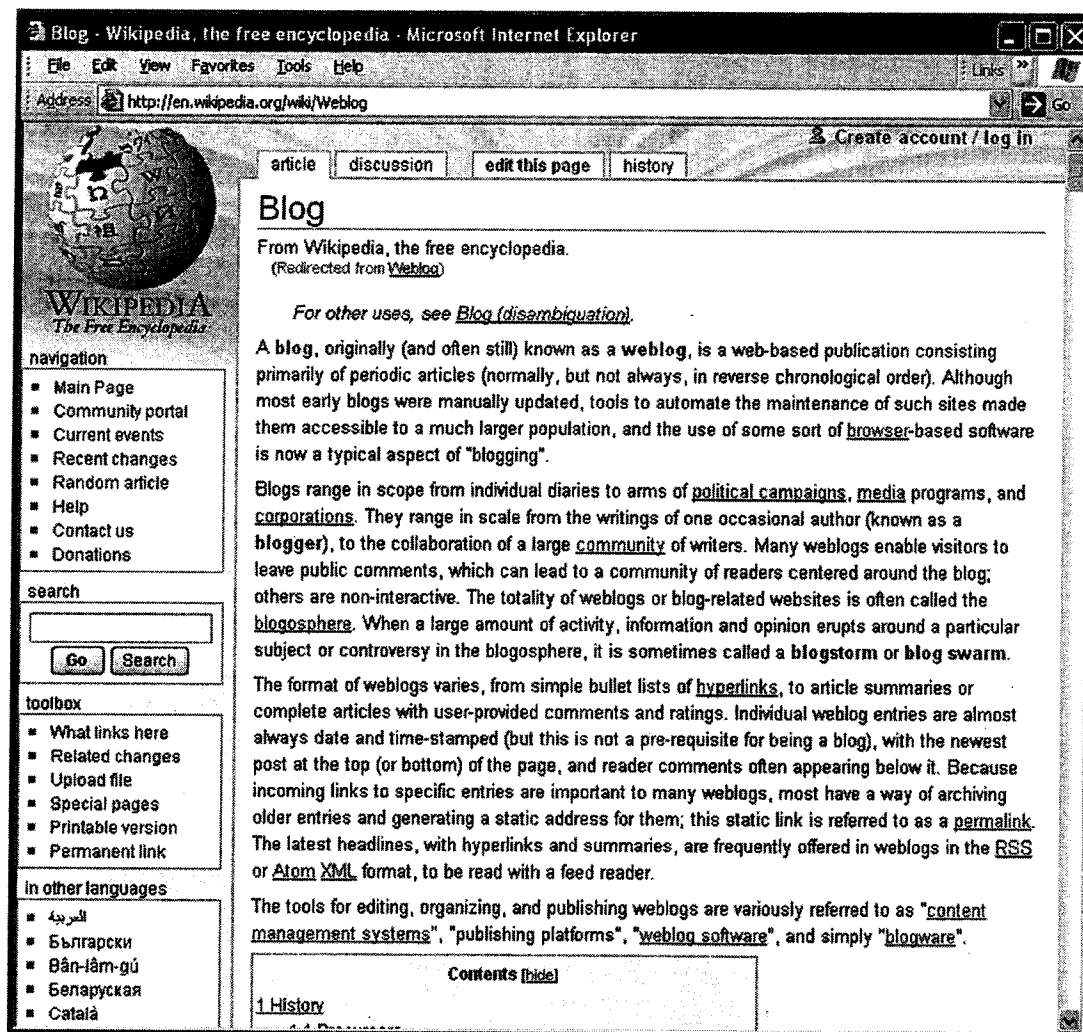
Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's what we're doing.

—Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia founder
(Wales, 2004)

If you want to find the most important site on the Web these days, look no further than Wikipedia.org (see Figure 4.1). As its name suggests, Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, one that really is attempting to store the “sum of human knowledge.” In December of 2005, the English version of Wikipedia housed more than 865,000 separate entries with information about everything from the *Aabenraa* (a small municipality in Denmark) to *Zzzax* (a fictional supervillain from Marvel Comics). Every day, new entries are being added about people, places, things, historical events—even today’s news almost as it happens. It’s truly an amazing resource.

But whereas most people get the “pedia” part of the name, only a few really understand the first part, the “wiki.” And believe it or not, that’s the most important part, because without the wiki, this encyclopedia, this growing repository of all we know and do, could not exist. The word *wiki* is a short form of the Hawaiian *wiki-wiki*, which means “quick.” The first wiki was created by Ward Cunningham in 1995, who was looking to create an easy authoring tool that might spur people to publish. And the key word here is “easy,” because, plainly put, a wiki is a Website where anyone can edit anything anytime they want.

Figure 4.1 Wikipedia is the online encyclopedia that anyone can contribute to. (Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>, retrieved September 7, 2005.)



So, have some knowledge about your favorite hobby that isn't on Wikipedia? Add it. Read something you think isn't correct? Fix it. Don't like the way one of the entries is written? Erase it. Something big just happen in the news that is history making? Start a new entry. You have the power, because every time you access Wikipedia or most any other wiki for that matter, you do so as Editor in Chief. And it's that freedom that has made Wikipedia the phenomenon it is as tens of thousands of Editors in Chief, people just like you and me, take on the job of collecting the sum of human knowledge.

Most everyone's first reaction to that is that it sounds more like Whackypedia. "If anyone can edit anything on the site any time they want, how in the world can you trust what you read there?" they ask. It's a great question And some high-profile errors found in late in

2005 make it a relevant question as well.. The answer is that, thankfully, there are vastly more editors that want to make it right than those who want to make it wrong. So when mistakes occur or vandals strike, the collaborative efforts of the group set it straight, usually very quickly. University of Buffalo professor Alex Halavais tested this by creating 13 errors on various posts on Wikipedia, all of which were fixed within a couple of hours (Halavais, 2004). And in December 2005, the magazine *Nature* compared 43 entries in Wikipedia to the same entries in *Encyclopedia Britannica* and found Wikipedia to be only slightly less accurate (<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v438/n7070/full/438900a.html>). Pretty amazing, I'd say.

Now I know what you're thinking, something along the lines of "Well, I can skip this chapter, 'cause this anyone-can-do-anything wiki thing will never work in my school." But, try to resist the urge; wikis can be pretty amazing and versatile. And if you believe as I do that doing real collaboration is something that every student needs to learn, keep reading.

Take, for example, the Wikipedia entry created around the Indian Ocean earthquake that struck just after Christmas 2004 and created the tsunami that killed more than 175,000 people. The event occurred just after midnight (GMT) on December 26, and the first 76-word post was created at Wikipedia about 9 hours later. Twenty-four hours after the first mention, the entry had been edited more than 400 times and had grown to about 3,000 words, complete with some of the first photographs of the devastation, a chart documenting the dead and injured, and other graphics describing how the tsunami was spawned.

Forty-eight hours after the first post, the entry had grown to more than 6,500 words, had been edited 1,200 times, and included more than a dozen graphics including video of the wave itself. Six months after the event, more than 7,000 changes had been recorded, and the post had settled at around 7,200 words. All of it had been created and recreated by people just like you and me who were interested in contributing what they were finding to the entry. It was without question the most comprehensive resource on the Web about that horrific event.

That's how each of Wikipedia's more than 860,000 entries has evolved, from the hands of people just like us with the concept that everyone together is smarter than anyone alone. In the process, we check facts, provide "soft" security by acting like a community watchdog, and weed out bias and emotion from the posts in an attempt to arrive at a neutral point of view for each article. Each entry is the group's best effort, not any one person's.

In that way, Wikipedia is the poster child for the collaborative construction of knowledge and truth that the new, interactive Web

facilitates. It is, to me at least, one of the main reasons I believe in the transformative potential of all of these technologies. No one person or even small group of people could produce Wikipedia, as currently edits appear at a rate of one every two or three seconds. Every day, thousands of people who have no connection to one another engage in the purposeful work of negotiating and creating truth. They do this with no expectation that their contributions will be in some way acknowledged or compensated, and they do it understanding that what they contribute can be freely edited or modified or reused by anyone else for any purpose. The extent to which this happens and to which it is successful is truly inspiring.

And the success of Wikipedia has spawned a wiki revolution. Not only can you contribute to the sum of human knowledge, you can add your favorite recipes to Wikirecipes (<http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/WikiRecipes>), your best vacation bargains to Wikitravel (<http://www.wikitravel.org/>), even your favorite spots for Buffalo Wings to, you guessed it, the Buffalo Wings wiki (<http://buffalowings.wikispaces.org/>). There's also Wiktionary, Wikinews, Wikispecies, and Wikiquotes. You get the idea.

Like blogs, wikis are beginning to make inroads in just about every area of life. Corporations like Disney, McDonalds, Sony, and BMW have started using wikis to manage documents and information. MIT, Stanford, and other colleges and universities are testing the waters with their faculty and students. The city of Calgary is using a wiki to let people share resources, experiences, and favorite diversions (http://calgary.wikicities.com/index.php/Main_Page). In fact, there are now tens of thousands of wikis growing out there for just about every reason imaginable including sites for everything from song lyrics (http://www.kiwilyrics.com/Main_Page) to Star Trek (http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Main_Page). (In fact, the Star Trek wiki is one of the most impressive out there!)

In addition, wikis are also being used by project teams as a way to keep track of their work, by businesses who want their employees to share information and collaborate in an easy way, and teachers who want to collaboratively build resource sites for their classes. (Much more about that in a minute.) There are now even password-protected wikis that allow people to use the technology behind closed doors, and there are over 100 different wiki programs, most of them free via open source, that you can install on your server. In other words, just like blogs, wikis are coming of age.

So, how exactly do wikis work? Every page in a wiki has a link, usually at the top, that says "edit page" or something similar. When you click it, it takes you to the code behind the page. The vast majority

of what you will see is simple, editable text. But there is some wiki code, which is a bit different from HTML. It might take a bit of getting used to the look, but using it is easy. (More about the specifics later on.)

Each page on a wiki also comes with another very important feature: a page history. The link to it is usually near the "edit page" link, and when you click it, you can see when changes were made, by whom, and what was changed. The best part is that if need be, you can easily use the history list to revert back to a previous version of the page should someone come and muck things up. This, in fact, is how most vandalism is dealt with, and what makes vandals give up. And from a technical aspect, that's pretty much all you need to know.

Philosophically, wikis can play havoc with the traditional ideas of copyright and intellectual property. Obviously, they follow closely the open-source software ideal that the quality of the collectively produced product is more important than owning the idea or the code. Really, wikis bring the concepts of open source to the mainstream as the ideas and process are no longer reserved just for software developers.

All of these challenges are great entry points for a discussion about the use of wikis in the classroom. As we continue to move toward a world where everyone has access to ideas and where collaboration is the expectation rather than the exception, wikis can go a long way to teaching our students some very useful skills for their future.

THE CHALLENGE OF WIKIPEDIA IN SCHOOLS

Before we talk about building our own wikis with students, a couple of more thoughts on Wikipedia. Already students are turning to Wikipedia as a resource for research, much to the chagrin of many teachers and librarians. As we've already discussed with blogs, knowing what sources to trust is becoming a much more labor-intensive exercise, and wikis, with many often anonymous authors, make that even more difficult. The idea that "it might be wrong" is a tough one for most people to overcome. Yet Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, has called Wikipedia one of the most accurate encyclopedias in the world (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Steve_Jobs). What to do?

For one, teachers should spend some time checking Wikipedia's accuracy on their own. If your experience is anything like mine has been, you may end up agreeing with Jobs. But this still takes a faith that we didn't need in the days before the interactive Web, a faith that collectively we can produce information that is as high quality as what a trusted few produced in the past. It's a tough call. The early consensus among educators seems to be to tell students to use Wikipedia as a starting point for their work, but not as a sole resource.

The additional challenge with Wikipedia is that each of its entries is, in fact, a collaboratively written research report. It's not exposition in the sense that the entries are defending a thesis, just the opposite, in fact. But say you assign students to do reports on a specific country, Argentina, for instance. All the pertinent reporting about Argentina may have already been done and collected at Wikipedia. So in this case, is it more important for a student to be able to find that information and know how to evaluate it or to know how to repeat work that's already been done? Again, it's a tough call.

A final challenge is changing the way we think about the content our own students create. Should we be encouraging them to contribute what they learn and know to the Wikipedia entry on that topic? Think about it. If your student produces a great research paper on global warming, why shouldn't she add what she found to the global warming entry at Wikipedia? And why shouldn't we watch together to see what happens to that information that she adds? If it gets modified, we can think critically about those modifications. If it gets spammed (which is highly unlikely), we can come to the rescue. Either way, it can be a great learning experience.

If we begin to look at Wikipedia as another opportunity for our students to contribute what they learn and know to a larger audience, I think we can begin to appreciate it for the really incredible site that it is.

WIKIS IN SCHOOLS

So what about it? Are you ready to begin thinking about how a wiki might work in your classroom? Hopefully, despite the seemingly chaotic design of wikis, you're starting to imagine the possibilities here. So, before taking a look at the ways in which some forward thinking teachers have been using wikis in their classrooms, let's talk about some of the more obvious concerns. Namely, what would stop someone from anonymously going onto a class-run wiki and vandalizing it by erasing content or by adding profanities, for instance? There is no doubt that teachers on the K-12 level are going to be hard pressed to justify the use of such an open venue for the publication of student work, though, as we'll see, there are some that are doing just that. In theory, the "soft security" model could work in schools as well. If it's used as a group collaboration site a la Wikipedia, the class as a whole could monitor the content that is added and make the necessary edits and revisions. Giving students editorial control can imbue in them a sense of responsibility and ownership for the site and minimize the risk of someone adding something offensive. In fact, wiki projects in

schools have worked best when the teacher loosens the reins a bit and lets students manage the content on the site.

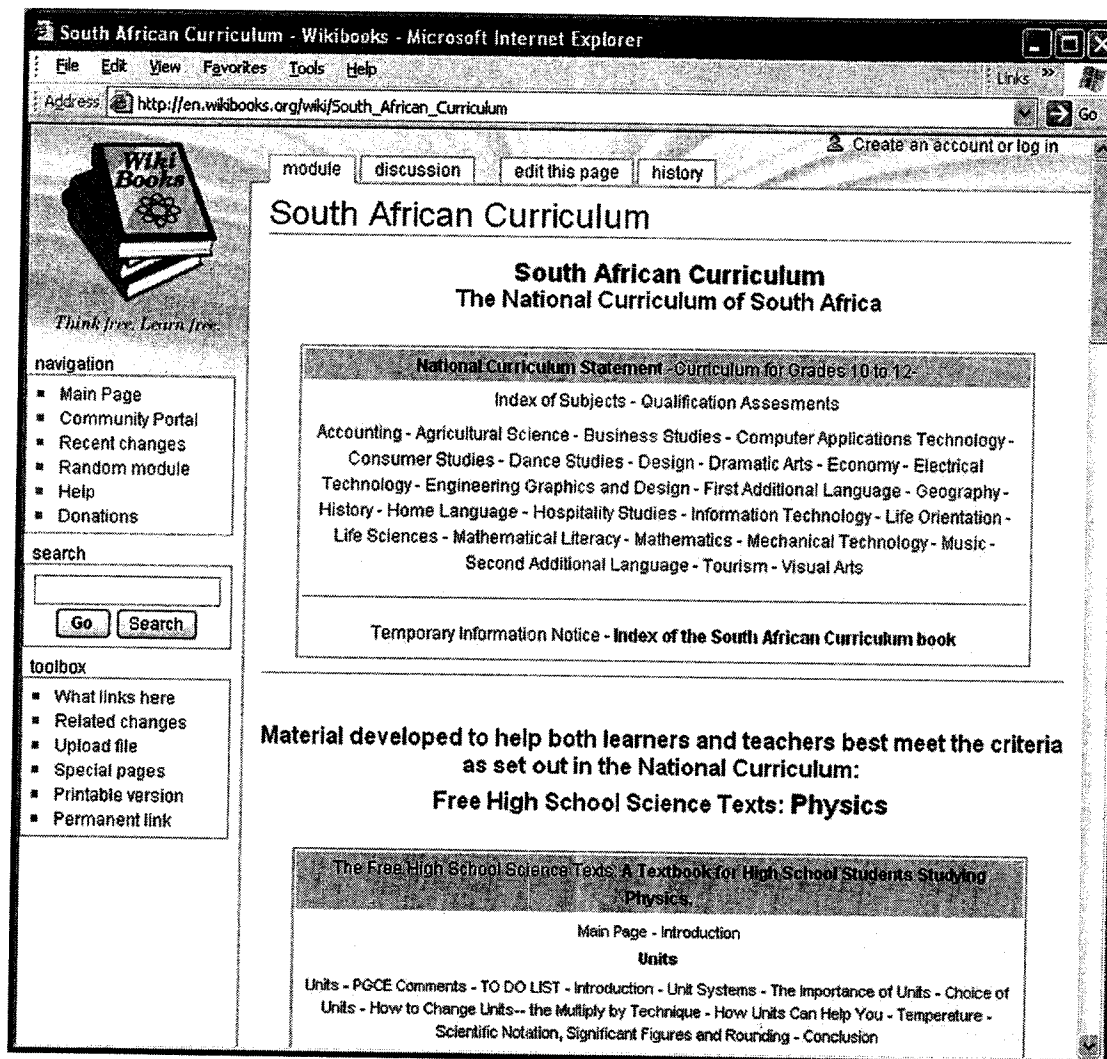
As much as we'd like to trust our students to make good things happen, however, we all know that it would only take one parent to open the wiki and find something inappropriate to derail the project. The good news is that there are alternatives. Although wiki purists scoff at the idea, there are a number of Web-based wiki sites that feature a password and login system similar to Weblogs for people to interact with the site. Or similar software can be installed on your server and run locally. It's still a much more open and collaborative environment once inside, but in this way you can restrict who can and cannot access the site.

Wikis pose some pedagogical challenges as well. They can be so effective at fostering collaboration that the teacher really needs to carefully examine her role in their use. As I noted previously, early implementations of wikis in educational settings have shown that the more autonomy teachers give to students in terms of negotiating the scope and quality of the content they are creating, the better. It's a very democratic process of knowledge creation. In using wikis, students are not only learning how to publish content; they are also learning how to develop and use all sorts of collaborative skills, negotiating with others to agree on correctness, meaning, relevance, and more. In essence, students begin to teach each other. Teachers who impose a lot of right and wrong on that process can undermine the effectiveness of the tool. (For a further discussion of the pedagogical potentials see http://www.profetec.org:16080/dossiers/article.php3?id_article=970)

And remember, if the openness of wikis feels a bit too disruptive, wikis can be used in many other contexts inside schools as well. As we'll see, they can be used as collaborative tools among teachers or districts to collect and share information.

So how might we use wikis in our classrooms? One of the most obvious ways is to create an online text for your curriculum that you and your students can both contribute to. A co-construction of this type could make for a much more personalized text, one specific to your particular class. Or consider adding other students and other teachers who teach the same class. It could easily become a resource, a showcase for best practices, and an articulation tool as well. Students might use it to create their own class Wikipedia. If it's a physics class, for instance, students could post and edit entries that deal with the structure of the atom or ionization or . . . other things. (Remember, I was an English teacher.) They could add graphics and links, annotations and reflections. Just like blogs, they could also post PowerPoint presentations, video and audio files, and spreadsheets. And all of those collectively

Figure 4.2 The South African high school curriculum is being built on a wiki. (Retrieved from http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/South_African_Culture, retrieved September 7, 2005.)



assembled artifacts could serve as a starting point for future classes to then edit and add to.

Personally, the ability to easily amass and publish a wide-ranging, tailor-made resource like this is why I have a feeling that textbook manufacturers don't like the ideas of wikis one bit. Sure, they can always say that you can't trust a source that's not professionally edited. But in the era of the Read/Write Web, we are all editors, and we must all become skilled at doing that work. As these tools become more and more accessible, and as they continue to foster the publication and sharing of reliable information, it may not be long until traditional textbooks will fade into the background.

Don't believe it? Well try this on for size: the California Open Source Textbook Project (COSTP). According to its Website, "COSTP

is projected to augment current K-12 textbook supply chain, be self-supporting with 18 months of starting up, and save the State of California upwards of \$200M+ per year for K-12 textbook allocation within five years" (COSTP, 2005).

Or how about this: The entire national high school curriculum for the country of South Africa is now in a wiki (shown in Figure 4.2, http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/South_African_Curriculum). The goal is to make it easy for teachers to share information on how to deliver certain lessons or achieve certain goals with their students. What a concept, huh? Can you imagine what that resource could become?

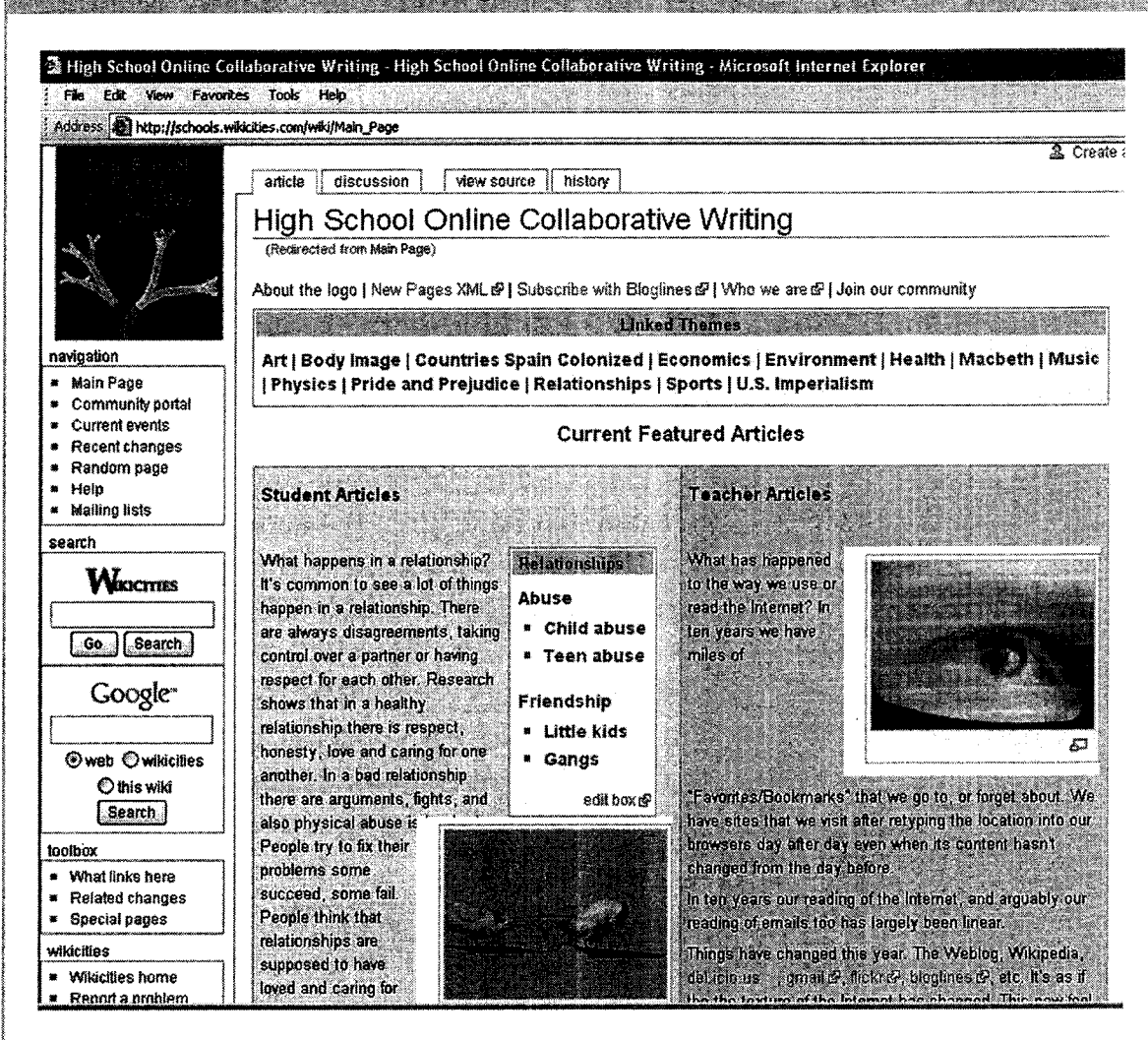
This is happening on an even wider scale at Wikibooks, where almost 10,000 textbook modules have been created in just 2 years (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page). Which brings up another way that you can use wikis in your classroom: have your students create or edit entries to books that have already been started elsewhere. Introduce them to the concept of a wiki, show them how it works, have them pick an entry to edit, review their edits with them, have them share the link when their work is posted, and then have them track their edits to see how others might edit them. It's a great opportunity to introduce students to the concepts of open source software, community collaboration, respect for other people's ideas, intellectual property and public domain, and much more.

EXAMPLES OF WIKIS IN K-12 EDUCATION

Among the teachers using wikis in schools, few have done more than Paul Allison at East Side Community School in Manhattan. Paul, who is also a blogger (<http://nycwp.org/paulallison/>), has created an incredible wiki site (shown in Figure 4.3, http://schools.wikicities.com/wiki/Main_Page) that involves the work of about 100 students and teachers who are creating entries about everything from bulimia (http://schools.wikicities.com/wiki/Can%27t_Keep_It_Down%3F) to basketball (<http://schools.wikicities.com/wiki/Basketball>). In addition, the wiki serves as the online place for staff and community news, art shows, sports teams, and much more.

On his own blog, Paul says, "To write in a wiki is to compose within a living organism" (Allison, 2005). As students approach the wiki with writing ideas in mind, they first search to see if content about that topic has already been posted. So they need to read critically first, if they are to find the areas where information is missing or disorganized. Even though the writing is not their own, they must take it as their own because they have the ability to edit and make it better. This is a huge shift.

Figure 4.3 Paul Allison uses a wiki with his high school students to teach collaborative writing skills. (Used with permission of Paul Allison.)



As students interact with the wiki, they are learning not only about collaboration but about publishing and writing as well. Here is an example. Carlos, who is a sophomore, thinks the Yankees' Alex Rodriguez is the best baseball player in the majors. So, he created a page in the wiki (http://schools.wikicities.com/wiki/Alex_Rodriguez) where, with a template created by Paul, he's writing an argumentative essay to that effect. Other students can then also edit the post. (And if you want a great deconstruction of how all this works, check out Paul's blog posting on December 4, 2005, at <http://www.nycwp.org/paulallison/2005/12/04>)

"It's interesting when students are really reading something and thinking about how to change it," Paul says. "And it's different in that instead of saying 'I'm against abortion,' they have to figure out how to say that 'some people are against abortion.' The community builds the

argument, not any one person" (P. Allison, personal communication, April 26, 2005).

He has also been excited by how many of his students have gone in and added posts on their own, posts about the environment and other topics that concern their lives. He says that despite the openness of the site (no login required) there has been very little vandalism, although he does monitor the posts very closely via the history list.

Another example is the Holocaust Wiki Project (<http://www.ahistoryteacher.com/holocaust/tiki-index.php>) developed by Dan McDowell for his students at West Hills High School in Santee, California. First, groups of students develop the outlines of a family living through the Holocaust based on historical and geographical research. Then each group sets up a number of choices that the family must make, annotates each choice with pros and cons, and asks the reader to make one of the choices to see what happens. For instance, a Jewish family may at first have the choice of trying to run or following the Nazi instructions to report to a camp. Depending on the choice you make, you're faced with another decision, and as the reader makes these choices, the narrative of the family is written. Each of these choices are added to the wiki as a separate page and then woven together via links into a self-selected story.

The process for developing this simulation demands some fairly complex thinking and planning; if you're at all interested in this project, take some time to read through it. The wiki facilitates the whole process. "Using a Wiki allows [students to] easily create web pages... edit each others' work, and easily link the pages together," Dan writes (McDowell, 2005; <http://www.ahistoryteacher.com/holocaust/tiki-index.php?page=About+this+Project>). I think it's a great use of a wiki, where page creation is easy and creating a webbed narrative like this can be a really fascinating experience.

Another great wiki idea was spawned by Rob Lucas, a sixth-grade teacher from North Carolina who created the Teacher's Lounge (<http://teacherslounge.editme.com/>). Basically it's a site where any teacher can come and leave a lesson plan for other teachers to share. Rob is trying to "develop an extensive library of creative, finely tuned, engaging, exciting lessons." A similar, more local wiki for teachers in your district might be an equally interesting idea.

And then there is Planet Math (<http://planetmath.org/>), which is "a virtual community which aims to help make mathematical knowledge more accessible." This is a dynamic community of math educators that is collaboratively creating a mathematics encyclopedia (a la Wikipedia), and anyone can participate. (Just sign up to become a member.) Currently there are more than 4,400 entries, ranging

from abelian to Zsigmondy's theorem, neither of which I remember studying in school. In this case, each entry has an "owner" that reviews any changes on a regular basis, but the concept is the same.

So let's take a minute and imagine the possibilities here. Your students, with just a little help from you, could create book report wikis, what-I-did-this-summer wikis, brainstorming wikis, poetry wikis, notes-from-class wikis, sixth-grade wikis, history-of-the-school or community wikis, formula wikis, wikis for individual countries they might be studying, political party wikis, exercise wikis . . . you get the idea. And you could create similar spaces for colleagues to save research or do articulation or much, much more. Whatever topic might lend itself to the collaborative collection of content relating to its study, a wiki is a great choice.

WIKI TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

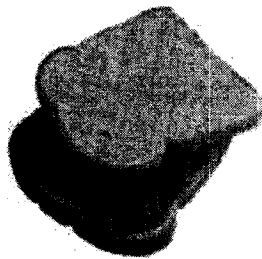
If you want to give wikis a try in your classroom, you may want to start at the Peanut Butter Wiki site shown in Figure 4.4 (<http://www.pbwiki.com>). The bad news is you and your students will have to share a password, so you won't be able to track who is doing what unless they include their first name or identifier when they login to the wiki. The good news is, if you like, only you and your students will be able to access the site, and, of course, PB Wikis are free. You can create as many as you want, so think about small-group wikis as well. To create your site, just type in the name you want for your wiki on the top line and an e-mail where a confirmation and password can be sent. When you get the e-mail, just click the link back to your PB Wiki site, enter the password that was sent to you, and you're off. That's it!

The first thing you'll want to do is change your password to something you'll remember. Use the "Admin" tab at the top of the page and then click on the Change Password link. And remember, if you want your students to collaborate on the site, you'll need to give them the password as well. With PB Wiki, only the site creator can change the password, so if for some reason outsiders get access, you can slam the door on them.

Under the "Admin" tab you'll also be able to set whether or not you want the wiki site to be public (a nice option to have), and you can save a copy of your wiki as a backup, something you should probably do on a regular basis, just to be safe.

When you're ready to start building your wiki, you might first review the "WikiStyle" guide that is linked from your homepage. (Note: Almost all of the different wiki software have what's called a

Figure 4.4 Peanut Butter wiki is one free site for educators to consider. (Used with permission of David Weekly.)



pb wiki

Make a free, password protected wiki as easily as a peanut butter sandwich.

WikiName *Just letters, no spaces.*

Email *We'll mail you the password.*

(we don't spam)

"Sandbox" to play around in before you actually start creating.) To make a new page in PB Wiki, you simply click "Edit" on the homepage and, in the text box that appears, add a word that has two capital letters with small letters in between: for example, FirstPage. That's the form that all new page links take. When you "Update" your edits, you'll see the word "FirstPage" is now a link on your homepage. Simply click the link, and it will take you to a text entry box where you can start entering your content. Remember, those MashedTogetherWords are what you use to build your site. Every time you need a new page for something, just CreateAName. And then anywhere you put that MashedTogetherWord in your wiki, it will link to the relevant page. Try it . . . it's easier than it sounds.

Just as a note, with other wiki software, it may be the bracket ([) that is the mechanism for creating links and new pages. An example of this would be the Wikicities site that Paul Allison uses. Let's say, for instance that you were starting a wiki about everyone's favorite baseball team, the Chicago Cubs. If you want to create an entry for every player on the team, you click "edit page" and then start typing their names in brackets, like this:

[Mark Prior]
 [Kerry Wood]
 [Nomar Garciaparra]

When you save the page, the text will appear like this:

Mark Prior?

Kerry Wood?

Nomar Garciaparra?

The question marks are links, which when you click on them will take you to new pages created for that particular player. When you add content to those pages, the entire names on your homepage will automatically turn into links and the question marks will disappear. That's how you build your wiki site: create the link, then create the page. Like most free blog software, you'll need to get your files and pictures up onto the Internet before linking to them in your wiki.

Once you have your pages rolling, remember that you can add files or, alternatively, links to files that are a part of the class. Ourmedia.org (for files) and Flickr.com (for pictures) are made for this. To make pictures appear, just add brackets around the URL of the image. Making links to files or other unique URLs is a bit different, but still not as hard as HTML. Separate the URL and the name you want to give the link with a vertical line, and then put brackets around the whole thing. So if I wanted to make a link to Wikipedia, for instance, I would enter: [<http://en.wikipedia.org/> | Wikipedia].

If you want more control over what gets entered and by whom, you might want to try JotSpot (<http://www.jot.com>). It's much more feature rich than PB Wiki, and it will let you assign individual logins and passwords to the people you choose to participate. Right now, this service is free for up to five users and 20 pages. So you may need to create a series of wikis that you could conceivably tie together using a blog. From a teacher-only standpoint, JotSpot is a great tool.

Signing up for a JotSpot account is similar to PB Wiki. Click on the "Create Pages" icon on the homepage and follow the procedures. Once again, you'll need to confirm your account via e-mail. Once set up, take some time to go through some of the tutorials and documentation in the "Help Quick Links" in the right column. One nice difference between JotSpot and PB Wiki is that Jotspot uses a WYSIWYG editor that makes adding and changing content a breeze. (WYSIWYG stands for "what you see is what you get," so this editing system makes edited content appear in the same format as the final version on the page.) And creating new pages works the same way; MashWordsTogether and then click on the links they create to start putting content on the page.

But the great feature of JotSpot is the membership function. From the "More Actions" drop-down list at the top of the page, select

"Add/Manage Users." This will take you to a page where you can enter the student's name, her e-mail, assign her a password, and more. This way, every time she comes to add or change content on the site, she'll be logged in under her name and you'll be able to see the edits she's made. To track what edits have been made to the site, just click on the "Revisions" link at the top of the right-hand column. If you want to revert back to a previous version of the page, just click on the link to view it, click edit, and then click save.

JotSpot is much, much more than a wiki, however, and it would take a separate book just to go through all of the applications it features. It has everything from a blog to a checkbook register, so if you like what you see with the wiki, you may want to dig into it a bit more deeply.

OTHER WIKI TOOLS AND RESOURCES

As I said before, there is a whole slew of different wiki programs that you can choose from if PB Wiki or JotSpot doesn't fit the bill. The best list that I've found is the Wiki Engines list at <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiEngines> (Note: You may want to visit the site with whoever runs your servers).

Some other free tools to check out are SeedWiki.com and Wikicities.com. Both offer free wiki hosting with varying levels of permissions and access.

Finally, there are a few other interesting and cool wiki-type tools I'll mention that you might want to take a look at. First, there is WebNote, which is like an online Post-It Note repository (<http://www.aypwpw.org/webnote/>). Basically, you go to the site, create a page name in the form, and click "load" to get started. You can add a Post-It by clicking the little yellow icon in the upper left and then double-clicking in the yellow post-it-type box that appears. You can include basic HTML inside the boxes, and you can color code your notes for easy sorting. All of your notes are totally searchable, so you might want to think about creating some standard tagwords to add as you go along.

But the coolest thing about WebNote is that you can easily save snippets of text from Webpages you might be visiting. Here's how: The first time you go to your notes page, type "B" and a note will appear with a link for a bookmarklet. Drag the link to your "Links" toolbar on your browser, and the next time you're visiting a page and you find some text you want to save to your WebNote page, just highlight it and click that link. Automatically you'll be taken to your note page and you'll see your highlighted text in a box with a link to the source. Cool, huh? If you want to edit that note, just double click it.

Now why is this a wiki? Because anyone who knows where your page is can come in and add, edit, or delete notes. That's right, anyone. Good news is that makes it easy to share the space. Bad news is, well, you know the risks by now. But again, if someone comes in and destroys the content on the page, you can always revert back to the last correct version. So, although WebNote may be a bit too open for student use, you could create a WebNote page for group study or research with other teachers, and you can even subscribe to the RSS feed for that page to monitor what they are posting.

Or try Web Collaborator, which is a free wiki and blog tool that allows you to invite members to participate with three levels of access (<http://www.webcollaborator.com>). The "Project" is the wiki, and it has all the basic tools you'd want in terms of a history of updates, a WYSIWYG editor, and easy revisions. The "Discussion" is the blog that you and your collaborators can use to plan or update each other on the status of the wiki. It's a simple, fast little tool that has some powerful uses for student groups, and it too has an RSS feed.

Last but not least, if you're using Firefox as your browser, there is the Wikialong plug-in. Believe it or not, by using Wikialong you can leave a note on any page on the Internet so that when anyone else comes along while using Wikialong, they'll be able to add to it. What a concept.

Regardless of how educators feel about the potential of wikis, and I can understand the hesitancy many teachers feel, one thing remains certain. The collaborative environment that wikis facilitate can teach students much about how to work with others, how to create community, and how to operate in a world where the creation of knowledge and information is more and more becoming a group effort. I'm serious when I say that I get chills sometimes when I think about the amazing work that's being done at Wikipedia. In many ways, it gives me great hope for the future because it is a testament, I think, of good people doing good. Using wikis, we can start to show our students what it means to be a part of that process.

And if the wiki bug does bite you as it has me, this might come in handy:

Please, grant me the serenity to accept the pages I cannot edit,
The courage to edit the pages I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference

—The Wiki Prayer

<http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm04/erm0452.asp>

Have fun!